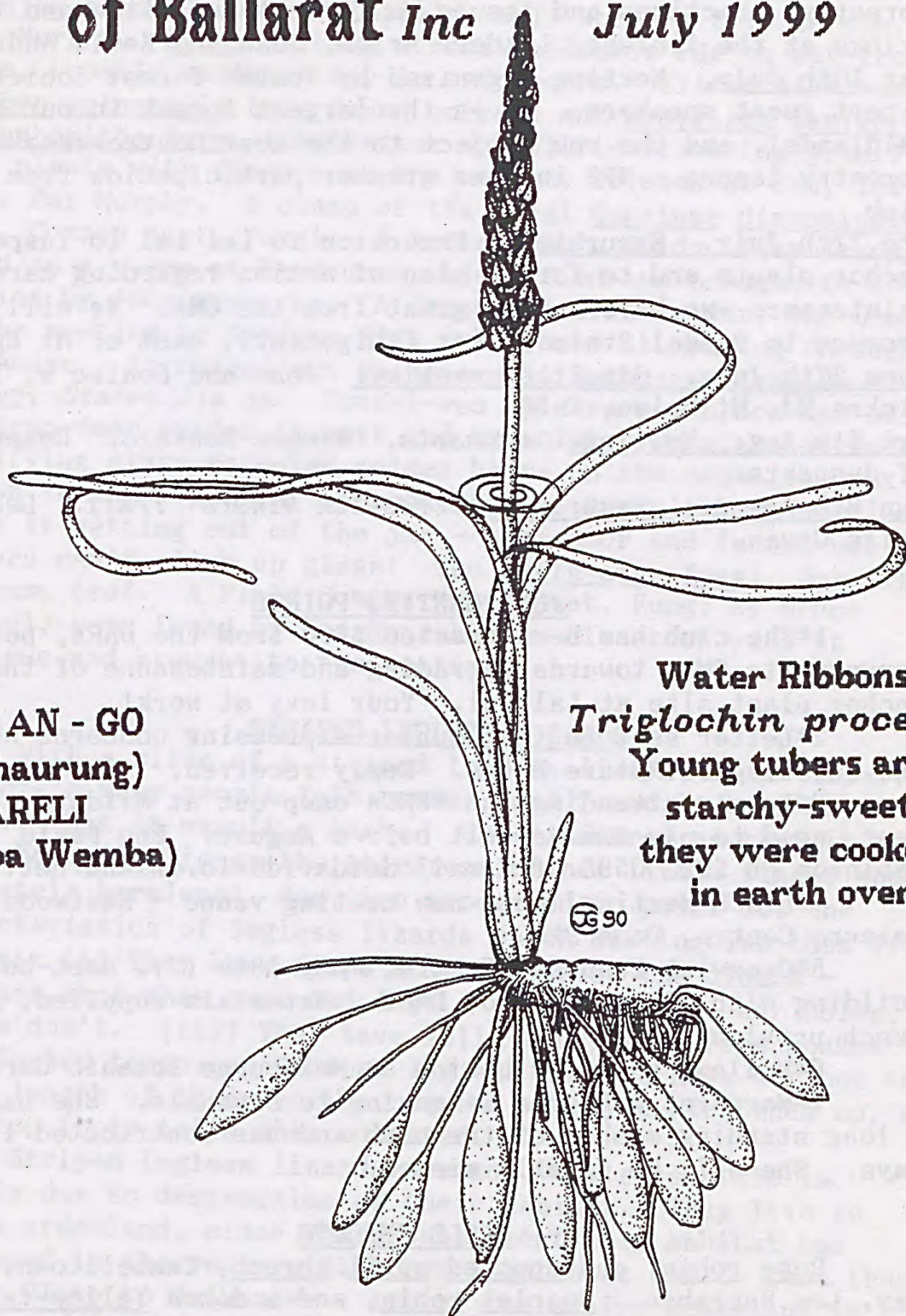


Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Inc

July 1999



POL - AN - GO
(Wathaurung)
NARELI
(Wemba Wemba)

Water Ribbons
Triglochin procera
Young tubers are
starchy-sweet,
they were cooked
in earth ovens.

From Victorian Koorie Plants, by Gott and Conran

DIARY DATES

Fri 2nd July. Meeting. *An Introduction to Water Watch.*
Speaker Catherine Barnes, Water Watch Co-ordinator.

Sun 4th July. Excursion. *Wombat Forest.* Fungi, fern gullies, forestry: practices and issues, a fire at lunchtime and fizzy drinks at the finish! Leaders Brian, Joan and Kevin Andrews.

Sat 10th July. Meeting organized by Wombat Forest Society. Expert guest speakers. WF is the largest forest in our area (Midlands), and the one subject to the most controversy over forestry issues. WFS invites greater participation from our club.

Mon 12th July. Excursion. Excursion to Lal Lal to inspect anchor plants and to form a plan of action regarding care and maintenance -we have a \$990 grant from the CMA. We will then proceed to Bungul State Forest (Whipstick), east of Mt Egerton.

Tues 27th July. Committee meeting. John and Denise's,
, 7-30.

Fri 6th Aug. Meeting. *Dunnarts.* Reuben Montero. Researcher of dunnarts.

Sun 8th August. Excursion. *Creswick Miners' Trail.* Leader Brian Gavan.

JUNE MEETING POINTS

1*The club has been granted \$990 from the DNRE, per the Corangamite CMA, towards upgrading and maintenance of the anchor plant site at Lal Lal. Your levy at work!

2*Letter sent to the Courier expressing concerns about the shifting of Nature Notes. Reply received.

3*People attending the VFNCA camp-out at Mildura, 15-19th Sept, need to pay \$25 deposit before August. Enq David Robinson ph 5023 0598 or E-mail dotdavid@vic.ozland.net.au

4*LINCS meeting, note new meeting venue - Eastwood Leisure Centre, Dana St.

5*Creswick Landcare Centre, July 18th (?), nest-box building with Nick Jashenko, DNRE. Materials supplied, light lunch provided. \$35

6*Wollemi pine exhibition at Melbourne Botanic Gardens.

7*Margaret Rotheram is moving to Drysdale. She has been a long standing member of the club and has contributed in many ways. She will be greatly missed.

FIELD REPORTS

Rose robin, and spotted quail thrush, Cambelltown, 25th May, Les Hanrahan. Scarlet robin, and a dozen Yellow-tailed black cockatoos, 25th May, St George's Lake, Carol Hall.

Correa reflexa and Acacia genistifolia flowering, Linton TFN block, 4th June, John Gregurke. Sulphur crested cockatoos in walnut trees, also every day yellow winged honeyeaters in grevillea at our place, Norman St, Wendouree, Alyson Pilmore. Banksias along Incol Rd, Enfield, well worth a trip to see, Bill Murphy. Swans walking across Wendouree Pde to eat fresh grass, usually early in May to eat acorns. Eileen Anderson. Eastern spinebills have found correas and Grevillea lanigera Mt Tamboritha form, (the latter a prolific flowering plant) both plants with flowers at the moment, Doveton St Sth, 1st June, Pat Murphy. A clump of the fungi Coprinus disseminatus (ref. Common Aust. Fungi - A Naturalist's Guide, Tony Young), found on a stump at Wendouree, identified and brought to the meeting by John Gregurke. A large blackish spider, was brought to the meeting by Lyndsay Fink -who found it roaming through his house. It turned out to be a male Melbourne trap-door spider, Stanwellia sp. Funnel-web spiders are black and shiny, the trap-door spider is matt and brownish. Examination under a magnifying glass revealed golden hairs on the cephalothorax - common in this species. Arachnophobics needn't have worried about it getting out of the jar - trap-door and funnel-web spiders can't climb up glass! Two earth-star fungi, Geastrum indicum, (ref. A Field Companion to Aust. Fungi by Bruce Fuhrer), were found by Les Hanrahan in his stock yard at Bungaree and brought to the meeting.

STRIPED LEGLESS LIZARDS

With a slide of a striped legless lizard, *Delma impar*, on the screen many people felt uneasy, and found it hard to believe that it wasn't a snake. Sue reassured us that it was only about 30cm long, the thickness of her little finger and completely harmless! Sue then proceeded to point out the characteristics of legless lizards which distinguish them from snakes:- (i) They have flaps at the rear of the cloaca - evidence that they once had legs. (ii) They have ear holes, snakes don't. (iii) They have solid tongues whereas snakes have forked tongues. Striped legless lizards have stripes the whole length of their bodies, squeak when you pick them up, and can drop their tails when molested.

Striped legless lizards are now very rare, this is largely due to destruction of their habitat. They live in native grassland, since white settlement this habitat has decreased in the western district from about 10% to less than 0.1%. Close to Melbourne a lot of the native grassland is being used for housing and industry. In rural areas more than 99.5% is being used for agriculture. Striped legless lizards

spend much of their life underground so they are often killed by the land being cultivated, or the pugging of wet ground by cattle. Weeds such as Chilean needle grass pose a severe threat. Predators such as foxes, dogs and cats also take their toll. The results of fire look bad, but in actual fact fire is essential to maintain native grassland in a natural condition. Burning is best if it occurs about every second or third year. Light grazing is also satisfactory.

Striped legless lizards are diurnal and insectivorous. In the past they were killed and samples taken from the liver for genetic testing, it is now possible to get the same information from tail clippings. Such research has shown that the Victorian specimens are genetically similar to those from New South Wales - so the two populations which are now separated, were once presumably a single, continuous population. Sexing was done with the belief that males were larger and had a different number of ventral scales - this has proved to be unsatisfactory, nowadays specimens are given an X ray, with males a post cloacal bone can be observed. Males also have a spur behind the hind limb. The first ever captive breeding was done at the zoo last year. Two eggs were laid in an underground chamber and the young were wriggly and worm-like with black heads. Experiments are being conducted to determine the optimum sex ratio for mating, three females for each male seems to be the best.

The lizards are usually caught using pit fall traps or rock rolling. They can be marked with fluorescent dye and when they are released they leave a trail which is visible for up to 24 hours, such experiments have shown that they can travel up to 60m in a night. For mark and recapture experiments a code can be burnt into the ventral scales using a butane soldering iron - but this makes them squeak a bit!

Finally we were shown a wide variety of other grassland fauna -reptiles, amphibians, birds such as the plains wanderer which you might see at Terrick Terrick NP and animals such as the fat tailed dunnart, which we will be seeing in August.

A fine talk and fine slides on an interesting topic.
Note Sue recently became the first student to graduate from Ballarat University with a PhD in environmental science!

Brian Andrews

MONASH UNIVERSITY GARDEN AND BLACKBURN LAKE.

.....On a fine sunny day in the middle of winter!

The club hired a small bus for the journey to Melbourne and our driver was club member, Paul Norquay. We first visited Monash University where part of the garden was designed for

aboriginal food plants. Dr Beth Gott of the school of Biological Sciences at the University, showed us through these gardens and also explained the uses of many of the plants which were important to the life of Koories in Victoria.

The silver wattle and the golden wattle (*Karrank*) produce edible gum which oozes out when the bark is notched, while some wattle species produce seeds which were ground up and used for damper.

Some basket making plants were *Lomandra longifolia*...spiny mat rush (*Kurawan*), *Poa labillardiera*...tussock grass (*Bowat*), *Carex tereticaulis*...sedge (*Poong'ort*), *Typha domingensis*...bulrush (*Cumbungi*) and various other rush species. With the bulrush, the roots were cooked and then chewed till the starch was removed. The remaining fibre was then knotted to make string. The leaves were used for basket making and the young shoots were eaten raw as a salad ingredient.

Coprosma hirtella...rough coprosma, bears delicious red juicy fruit and *Enchylaena tomentosa*...the ruby saltbush (*Gurgudj*) produces small reddish edible fruit.

The tubers of all orchid species were eaten by the Koories. Steaming by way of lighting a fire in a dry hole, using stones as a heat retainer and then covered with wet grass, enabled the tubers to be cooked.

All the University grounds are planted with Australian native plants except one central quadrangle area which mostly contained exotics. Here we admired the citrus garden and a cumquat tree with its lovely orange fruits. And a butchers broom! Beth explained to us the "leaves" of this bush are strictly cladodes, usually about 2 to 3cm long. In the centre of each cladode one or two small greenish flowers appear in spring, (we noticed the buds) developing by late autumn into round scarlet berries.

We finished our university tour when Claire Dalman ably thanked Beth for an interesting and informative morning. Blackburn Lake Sanctuary...is one of the few remaining areas of natural bushland in Melbourne. It is the best known bushland park within the City of Whitehorse. It is a wildlife sanctuary for birds, animals, fish, plants, insects and fungi. The local Aboriginal clan of the Wurundjeri used many of the Sanctuary's indigenous plants and animals for their daily needs including clothing, food, medicine, fibre, canoes, shelter and tools. The lake was built in 1888 to control flash flooding, provide water for orchards and for natural beauty. In 1908 the Adult Deaf Society purchased the land to provide a home for the

deaf and for the cultivation of cut flowers. During the First World War it was used for recreation by many, including wounded service men.

The City of Nunawading acquired the land between 1975 and 1980. It links with the Blackburn Creeklands to provide "greenways" for birds. Stormwater and runoff from the local area feed and can pollute the water in the lake. Water leaving the lake enters Gardiners Creek, then the Yarra River and consequently Port Phillip Bay. (from the City of Whitehorse pamphlet)

We lunched on the lawns, enjoyed the exhibits in the pavilion and walked the trail around Blackburn Lake. The heathland type vegetation was dotted with the lovely white flowers of common heath...Epacris impressa, and twining through the vegetation were many plants of the common apple berry...Billardiera scandens with pretty yellowish green bell shaped flowers. Admired too were the many wattle species nearly all covered in plump buds, ready for their wonderful spring display of golden blossom.

Our most pleasant day ended with a late afternoon tea before we wended our way back to Ballarat. Many thanks to Paul for his capable driving, Claire for arranging a most enjoyable and memorable excursion and to Jenny Dalman for suggesting Blackburn Lake.

Pat Murphy.

LINTON....NOT ALL WORK!

Its nice to think that if we have some good bush and just leave it alone, that it will stay good. Unfortunately things are not that simple, if we do nothing, weeds and vermin move in. With that fact in mind we headed out to the TFN reserve at Linton. Rabbits were our main target on this occasion. John picked up poison pellets from Kevin McKnight and after saying hello to a group of ducks that came over to check us out, we headed for the block, 1km west of the township.

A quick morning tea, then we headed off looking for burrows. John used a spoon, fastened to a stick, to deposit pellets of aluminium phosphide into the burrows. On contact with moisture the pellets released phosphine gas, with the burrows then sealed, the rabbits were killed. John, Peter and Kevin worked at great speed, John worked up quite a sweat - but he kept leaving the spoon behind!

Despite the frenzy of activity we had time to notice the treasures of the bush. Spreading wattle was festooned with creamy yellow flowers, common Correa had bright red flowers with greeny yellow tips, a small grass tree had its flower spike pointing skyward, there were pretty yellow guinea flowers and purple tetraetheca - our first for the year.

There were lots of fungi, including rooting shank, horse manure -disgorging spores - with Claire's stick poking help, the bright yellow *Omphalia chromacea* and white punks -one conveniently growing at head height, another lying on the ground in the process of being eaten by fungus beetle larvae.

Kevin caught a large frog, which with a little encouragement posed well for the cameras. He also found the skeleton of a kangaroo. Carol took delight in reassembling the skull and we were all amazed at the length of the roots of the lower incisor teeth - about 5cm!

The birds were a bit quiet but we couldn't miss the grinding of a restless flycatcher and the harmonious calling of a grey thrush. It did however seem that the birds turned up to see us off, including a male scarlet robin with a bright red chest.

Quite a few blackberry brambles were also grubbed out. Peter cut through a tree that had fallen across the fence. A patch of gorse was noticed, it should be cut and painted with round-up in the future. Also about four white tails were noticed bobbing off into the distance - so you needn't worry, there will be work for our next trip out there! BDA

FROM THE PAPERS -SOME SUMMARIES.

World's oldest plant found in Tasmania. Botanists believe they have discovered the world's oldest living plant in the Tasmanian wilderneass.

Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service chief botanist Stephen Harris said tests indicated the *Lomatia tasmanica*, commonly known as King's Holly, was 43,000 years old.

Botanists previously thought the world's oldest living plant was a 13,000 year old United States huckleberry. The oldest tree is an Arizona bristle-cone pine, dated at a youthful 4,700 years of age.

Dr Harris said the Tasmanian plant was a self-propagating clone, which meant it did not produce seeds but reproduced by shedding "cuttings" of itself onto the forest floor which grew into genetically identical clones.

Cuttings from the plant were identical to fossilised remains in the forest floor carbon-dated at 43,000 years.

Courier, 9/7/97...Claire Dalman.

Sex with a bonus! A gallant breed of moth offers its mates the gift that keeps on giving - sperm laced with chemicals that grant them lifelong protection from predatory spiders, researchers say.

As a caterpillar, the male rattlebox moth loads up on the chemicals by eating the rattlebox plant, a team of biologists

at Cornell University in New York report. These chemicals, known as pyrrolizidine alkaloids, taste vile to spiders. They go into the male's sperm, are delivered to the female during mating, and spread throughout her body within minutes, the Cornell team reported in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. "This classy moth receives a gift she can really use - a life assurance policy, if you will - that keeps paying off every time her life is in danger," said chemical ecologist Thomas Eisner.

The team tested their theories on live moths raised in the lab. Those feeding on rattlebox plants were left alone by spiders or quickly rejected after one touch. "The spiders actually cut them out of the web," Eisner said. "They don't even take a bite. All they do is touch her and they sense the presence of the chemical." Herald Sun, 12/5/99...Bob Curtain

JUNE POSERS....JOKING - NATURALLY!

J1...the happy cow ---we went to Lake Merrimu! Elfin.
 J2...who lived in the stone ruin ---the man who played the organ! Elfin. J3...kelp no good for pumpkins.---well pumpkin plants grow fast enough as it is, and if you put kelp on as fertilizer, the vines grow so fast that the pumpkins get worn out being dragged behind! Elfin and nobody challenged Lyndsay over his poser! J4...excited Ken / lady postie ---I've never seen a femail male-man before! KMCD ...oops, trouble with homophones again!? J5...bones on the moon ---just goes to show, the cow didn't quite make it! BDA J6...disorientated -- -throw your watch over your shoulder and it will go west! HB J7...why didn't Noah swat the flies? (author John Marsden) - I'm still trying to work that one out myself! BDA ...Jokers

JULY POSER...EGGS.

Helen is now wondering if people can explain why eggs are shaped the way that they are, ...well?

Quote. "We are all on a spaceship and that spaceship is Earth. Four billion passengers - and no skipper!" ...Werner von Braun

-----***----- FNCB -----***-----

Meetings are held at the Ballarat Horticulture centre, corner of Gregory and Gillies Streets, ie. the NW corner of the Botanic Gardens, commencing at 7-30pm

Excursions depart from Creswick Plaza at 9-30 am, unless specified otherwise.

Committee: Claire Dalman (President).. , Greg Binns (Vice President).. , Pat Murphy (Secretary).. , John Gregurke (Treasurer).. , Brian Andrews (Editor).. , Helen Burgess, Maureen Christie, Lyndsay Fink, Carol Hall, John Mildren.

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